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## College Education Established

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## CHAPTER VI

### COLLEGE EDUCATION ESTABLISHED

THE FULL EXTENT of the failure of Elmira and Wells to measure up to what a college of the first rank should be can be estimated by comparing their efforts with the founding of Vassar College at Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Truly this step marked a new era in the higher education of women. Instead of the discreet sops to popular prejudice that nothing radical was intended, Matthew Vassar challenged the world by his statement that he was founding a college for women as an act of social justice. "It occurred to me," he said, "that woman, having received from her creator the same intellectual constitution as man, has the same right as man to intellectual culture and development."<sup>1</sup> In pursuance of this ideal, in 1861, a charter for the college which bears his name was secured from the New York legislature. The idea of erecting some kind of public institution to perpetuate his name had long been in Mr. Vassar's mind. That his idea took shape in a college for young women was due largely to the influence of his niece, Lydia Booth, who was the head of a school for girls in Poughkeepsie.<sup>2</sup>

From its very inception Vassar College differed from its predecessors. Before the introduction of a student on the scene, the material foundations of a course of study and the choice of a faculty were both complete.<sup>3</sup> The newly elected president had spent eight months in Europe studying education in England, Scotland and France in the hope of finding something distinctive in the education of girls in order that the new college might not be a mere duplicate of the traditional college for men.<sup>4</sup>

It was Mr. Vassar's maxim from the beginning of his undertaking "to do all things intellectual and material the best possible and make your prices accordingly" . . . . the idea that "during the infancy of the college to court public patronage by catering to cheap or low prices of instruction is to my mind ridiculous. . . . I go for the best means cost what they may and corresponding prices for tuition in return." . . . "I am therefore for giving the daughters of the public the very best means of education and make them pay for it."<sup>5</sup> In another letter he suggests that "in the management of our scheme it might be well to diverge a little

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, James M. Haight, Elizabeth H., "Vassar College and its Founder," p 97.

<sup>2</sup> Haight, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, op., cit., p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> President's Visit to Europe.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Matthew Vassar, quoted in Haight, op. cit., p. 11.

from the common track even if nothing is gained but novelty.”<sup>6</sup> One of the novelties proposed was “to make the college not only a college to educate women but a college of instruction by women.”<sup>7</sup> Another innovation, not attempted by any college for women up to this date, was the designation of the first class by the term used in men’s colleges. From the opening day this class was called freshman instead of some phantastic name such as “protomathians” or “Novians.” The endowment was half a million dollars which equaled the sum given by Ezra Cornell to found the college which bears his name and was the largest sum of money ever given thus far in the history of education to further the higher education of girls. The endowments of Elmira and Wells were two hundred thousand each and that of Rutgers Female College only one hundred thousand. Instead of teaching the geography of Heaven, astronomy was taught by Maria Mitchell with the aid of the second largest telescope in America. The library had fifteen thousand volumes in contrast to two thousand at Elmira and equalling the number, exclusive of pamphlets, at Columbia.<sup>8</sup> The salary budget for the year 1869 was \$36,364.50 in comparison with Alfred’s \$8064.67 and Elmira’s \$6350.00.<sup>9</sup> This sum was even larger than the budget of some colleges for men, viz.: the University of the City of New York planned for only \$25,262.59 and Hamilton for only \$14,526.65.<sup>10</sup> Salaries for teachers compared favorably with Yale and Harvard. At Vassar, the president received four thousand dollars and the use of a furnished house,<sup>11</sup> while at Harvard, the same official received five thousand but no house and Yale gave its president only three thousand five hundred and perhaps a proportion of the graduate fees.<sup>12</sup> The men teachers at Vassar received salaries of from eighteen to twenty-five hundred while Harvard paid her teachers from two thousand to four<sup>13</sup> but the women teachers at Vassar received only three hundred fifty to a thousand with board.<sup>14</sup> It seems a curious limitation in Mr. Vassar’s thinking that he should be willing to found a college not only to educate women but a “college of instruction by women”<sup>15</sup> and yet be content

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Report of Regents, 1869.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Information furnished by the librarians of Yale and Harvard.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Report of Regents, 1869.

<sup>15</sup> Haight, op. cit., p. 144.

to pay Maria Mitchell, the most famous member of his staff, a salary of only eight hundred dollars with board for herself and her father.

The founder of Vassar provided, also, a lecture fund of fifty thousand dollars. The same amount was set aside for the library, art and cabinet fund and an additional fifty thousand for student aid.<sup>16</sup> The new college rejoiced in an adequate equipment which included a riding school and gymnasium, an infirmary, nearly fireproof buildings, steam heat, gas, running water, and bath rooms in contrast to other colleges where light and fuel were extra. A museum of natural history, an observatory, a library and laboratory equipment for chemistry, anatomy, physiology and natural philosophy completed the list.<sup>17</sup>

Vassar as well as Elmira and Wells had a "lady principal" who might be likened to the modern dean of women. The tuition was four hundred dollars a year for forty weeks while Elmira charged one hundred ninety dollars for the same period of time. Mr. Vassar, being a shrewd business man, believed in giving the public the best and making it pay for it.<sup>18</sup> The wisdom of this step as well as of the well-planned campaign of advertisement was made evident when four hundred young women came to the opening session. At a later date, 1869, Elmira reported only forty-nine students; Genesee seventy; Columbia one hundred forty-seven; Alfred sixty; Union sixty-five, and the University of the City of New York seventy-six.<sup>19</sup>

The new and much-heralded venture in the higher education of girls was not without interest to others engaged in similar lines of work. In June, 1870, Dr. Eliot, president of Harvard College, visited Vassar spending most of his time while there in the classrooms. The result of his visit was a pronouncement that "the boys at Harvard did not recite so well in German, French or Latin or even in mathematics as did the girls at Vassar."<sup>20</sup> So intense was this interest that "the whole college family" was constantly admonished that the higher education of women was in the experimental stage and that the world was looking on watching for its success or failure.<sup>21</sup> As a result of so much council, the girls became self-conscious for the public at large expected them to be walking encyclopedias of knowledge or else society looked at them askance. The position of the Vassar girl became so difficult in the face of such popular expectation

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<sup>16</sup> Catalogue 1868-69.

<sup>17</sup> Report of Regents, 1864.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, James M., "Before Vassar Opened," p. 261.

<sup>19</sup> Report of Regents, 1869.

<sup>20</sup> "Letters from Old Time Vassar."

<sup>21</sup> Wood, Francis A., "Earliest Years at Vassar."

that many concealed the fact of their attendance at the college. Especially was this true in social gatherings as hostesses very frequently objected to having Vassar students at their parties, so the only hope of a good time was to conceal such ambitions.<sup>22</sup> All of which seems to indicate that there was in the public mind an appreciation of a very sensible difference between the standards set at Vassar and those of the other institutions which went by the name of college.

Owing to the fund of fifty thousand dollars set aside for lectures, it was possible to bring many celebrated men of the day to lecture to the students. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edward Everett Hale, David Dudley Field, Noah Porter, Henry Ward Beecher and George William Curtis were among the speakers whom the students were privileged to hear.<sup>23</sup> Ike Marvel prepared a special lecture for Vassar girls on "How to Make Home Beautiful," but he failed to catch the tone of the college and his well-meant attempt was pronounced too sentimental.<sup>24</sup>

In the first report to the Regents made by the trustees of the college, the plan of organization as stated in the report was to found various schools according to the European custom. The schools were to be eight in number: a School of Religion and Morals; a School of Psychology, including mental philosophy and aesthetics; a School of History and Political Economy; a School of Languages and Literature; a School of Natural History; a School of Mathematics; a School of Art and Philosophy of Education, and a School of the Fine Arts.<sup>25</sup> As it was not possible to carry out such a scheme obviously far in advance of the times, Vassar was forced to content itself with the usual pattern of a college as found in America. Having accepted the limitation of its setting, the course of study worked out by the college compares favorably with the curricula found in the colleges for men.

The entrance requirements were Latin (Caesar, Cicero and Virgil), History of Greece and Rome, French, Algebra, Rhetoric, Modern History and Physical Geography.

A comparison of the Vassar College curriculum with the courses of study in three colleges for men and with Elmira follows:

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<sup>22</sup> Norris, Mary H., "The Golden Age of Vassar," p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> "Letters from Old Time Vassar."

<sup>25</sup> Report of Regents, 1864.

## FRESHMAN YEAR

<i>Vassar</i> <sup>26</sup>	<i>Yale</i> <sup>27</sup>	<i>Harvard</i> <sup>28</sup>	<i>Columbia</i> <sup>29</sup>	<i>Elmira</i> <sup>30</sup>
Latin French	Latin French	Latin French	Latin German	Latin Physical Geography
Mathematics Physiology & Hygiene	Mathematics Greek	Mathematics Greek	Mathematics Greek	Algebra Botany and Zoology
Art English Composition	History Rhetoric	Elocution Ethics	History General Grammar	
Choral Singing			History of English Language	
Perspective Drawing			Art of Composition	

## SOPHOMORE YEAR

<i>Vassar</i> <sup>31</sup>	<i>Yale</i> <sup>32</sup>	<i>Harvard</i> <sup>33</sup>	<i>Columbia</i> <sup>34</sup>	<i>Elmira</i> <sup>35</sup>
Mathematics Latin Greek	Mathematics Latin Greek	Mathematics Latin Greek	Mathematics Latin Greek	Geometry Latin Alexander's Christian Evidence
French	French	Italian	Grecian Antiquities	French
German	Rhetoric	German	Essays and Declamations	Political Economy
Natural History		History	History	Natural Philosophy
Choral Singing		Chemistry Elocution English		

<sup>26</sup> Vassar Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>27</sup> Yale Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>28</sup> Harvard Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>29</sup> Columbia Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>30</sup> Elmira Catalogue, 1872-73.

<sup>31</sup> Vassar Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>32</sup> Yale Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>33</sup> Harvard Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>34</sup> Columbia Catalogue, 1868-69.

<sup>35</sup> Elmira Catalogue, 1872-73.

JUNIOR YEAR				
<i>Vassar</i> <sup>36</sup>	<i>Yale</i> <sup>37</sup>	<i>Harvard</i> <sup>38</sup>	<i>Hamilton</i> <sup>39</sup>	<i>Elmira</i> <sup>40</sup>
German	Greek	Physics	German	French
Natural	Mathematics	Philosophy	Natural	Chemistry
Philosophy			Philosophy	
Logic	Natural	Rhetoric	Logic &	German or
	Philosophy		Rhetoric	Greek
English	Rhetoric	Chemistry	Lectures on	Geology
Literature			Classical	
Etymology	Latin		Literature &	
& Synonyms			Shakespeare	
Greek	German		Greek	Moral
Mathematics	German	ELECTIVES	Mathematics	Philosophy
Latin	Astronomy	Mathematics	Political	
Lectures	Logic	Greek	Economy	
Geology &	Theoretical	Natural		
Physical	Chemistry	History		
Geography	ELECTIVES	Latin	Biblical	
	Mathematics	Spanish	Exercises	
Astronomy	in place of	Italian	Class	
	Greek or	Ancient	Disputations	
	Latin	History	History	
French		Chemistry	French	
		English		
		German		

<sup>36</sup> Vassar, Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Yale, Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Harvard, Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton, Report of Regents, 1862.

<sup>40</sup> Elmira, Ibid.

# SENIOR CLASS

<i>Vassar</i> <sup>41</sup>	<i>Yale</i> <sup>42</sup>	<i>Harvard</i> <sup>43</sup>	<i>Columbia</i> <sup>44</sup>	<i>Elmira</i> <sup>45</sup>
Mental	Political	Logic &	Evidences of	German
Philosophy	Philosophy	Philosophy	Natural &	Astronomy
Chemistry	Mental	Physics	Revealed	History of
	Philosophy	Modern	Religion	Literature
German	Moral	History	Greek	Kames' Ele-
	Philosophy	Religious	Latin	ments of
Italian	Meteorology	Instruction	German	Criticism
	Experimental	Themes	Chemistry	White's
History	Chemistry	<b>ELECTIVES</b>	Astronomy	Christian
<b>of Art</b>	Rhetoric	Philosophy	Optics	Centuries
Art Study	Modern	Mathematics	Lectures on	English Lit-
Astronomy	History	History	Greek Lit-	erature
Greek or	Latin	Chemistry	erature &	Butler's
French		Greek	Comparative	Analogy
Moral	German	Latin	Philology	Art
Philosophy		German	or Greek	Criticism
Anatomy	Astronomy	French	History of	Greek Testa-
Physiology	Geology		Latin Lit-	ment
Lectures on	Theology	Spanish	erature &	
the Science of	Anatomy &	Italian	Topography	
Government	Physiology	English	of Rome	
Evidences of	Constitution	Modern	Archaeology	
<b>Christianity</b>	of the U.S	<b>Literature</b>	Geology	
	Natural	Patristic &	Mineralogy	
	Theology	Modern	Political	
	Evidences of	Greek	Economy	
	Christianity	Geology	Psychology	
	Roman Law	Anatomy	Philosophical	
	<b>ELECTIVES</b>	Zoology	Essays	
	German or		Calculus	
	Astronomy		Acoustics	
	or Latin		Philosophy	
			of the Will	
			& Essays	

Such an examination of the curriculum of Vassar shows certain interesting details. While Vassar did not offer as many subjects as did Yale, Harvard or Columbia, what was offered was of a high grade. Greek as a study for four years in a girl's college was unprecedented. The emphasis on physiology, anatomy and hygiene places Vassar in ad-

<sup>41</sup> Vassar, Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Yale, Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Harvard, Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Columbia, Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Elmira, Ibid.



vance of the colleges for men while the absence from the curriculum of such subjects as mechanics and applied mathematics detracts nothing from the value of the course offered.

It is impossible to compare text-books since the variation is great. Even in instances where the same text is used, as in Horace or Virgil, different selections for study were made. The number of students per teacher, also, makes a good showing. At Elmira, there were ten teachers to one hundred eight pupils including the preparatory school;<sup>46</sup> at Yale, eighteen teachers in the academic department to five hundred nineteen pupils;<sup>47</sup> at Harvard, twenty-two teachers to four hundred seventy-three pupils;<sup>48</sup> while at Vassar there were thirty-seven teachers to three hundred sixty-two pupils including the preparatory department.<sup>49</sup>

However the teachers at both Elmira and Vassar suffered from the limitation of having to teach both college and preparatory school.

In carrying out its ideals Vassar was handicaped in the same way as the other pioneer colleges. In order to obtain pupils, the state of public opinion as well as the unsettled condition of secondary education for girls had to be considered. Therefore the college was at first only an enlarged boarding school on its social side. Many of the students were of this type of girl. Not only had the young women no idea of what was meant by college work but their lives had to be strictly regulated and guided.<sup>50</sup> As the admission requirements were too high, it was found necessary to open a preparatory department. Even with this compromise there was a great demand for special courses and no idea of systematic work. It was not until the close of the third year that the institution attained full collegiate rank.<sup>51</sup> By 1870, the schedule of work had been so systematized that it was possible to differentiate between classes. All freshman work was obligatory, the sophomores had three assigned subjects while the juniors and seniors were permitted to choose three subjects with the approval of the faculty.<sup>52</sup>

In thus regulating studies in an orderly way, Vassar College not only standardized herself but the secondary school as well. It proved the poverty and the superficiality of the education given in the usual school for girls. The examinations for admission made clear that the preliminary education, though high in aim and earnest in effort, was wasteful and

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<sup>46</sup> Catalogue Elmira College, 1868-69.

<sup>47</sup> Catalogue Yale College, 1868-69.

<sup>48</sup> Catalogue Harvard College, 1869-79.

<sup>49</sup> Catalogue Vassar College, 1868-69.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Vassar College Catalogue, 1870.

barren. When work of college grade was attempted, it was found that the content of learning acquired in secondary schools for girls was small, the methods were lacking in disciplinary value and the result was inefficiency. It was largely due to the opening of this college that a system of preparatory education was made possible.<sup>53</sup>

To be sure, this result was not achieved in a day. Up to 1870 no college for girls in either New England or in New York had been able to open its doors without the handicap of a preparatory department nor having thus opened, was any college able to discard this seemingly necessary adjunct. The condition of secondary education was in such an unsystematized state that some concession on the part of the colleges was necessary, a concession which it was found difficult to withdraw. To Smith College at Northampton, Mass., founded by Miss Sophie Smith in 1871, is due the honor of being the first college to discard a preparatory department. When the college opened its doors in 1875, it took the bold step of admitting students by way of entrance examinations plus certificates of moral and social desirability. In thus acting, Smith cut down its entering class to sixteen, a very impressive gesture. In his opening address, the new president repeats again and again that the new venture is a college and nothing but a college. Further, he states, that if the community felt that it was not willing to support their efforts, the trustees were prepared to close the college at once. For fear that this impressive but radical statement might prove too far in advance of what public opinion considered desirable, there was required a satisfactory testimonial concerning social and moral attainments. Intellectual discipline, it was said, was essential but the girls were, also, to receive "a social refinement and culture which should enable them to feel at home in the best society and to conduct themselves with grace and propriety in any sphere of life."<sup>54</sup> To ensure the successful prosecution of this important phase of education a special department of social culture was founded. Training in this department was designed "to increase those graces and manners of social life which we justly esteem so highly" as it was "not the aim of the college to make women less feminine or less attractive in those graces peculiar to her sex."<sup>55</sup> Such statements have a familiar ring and differ very slightly, if at all, from the aim of the fashionable school which had been training the girls of the "best society" for centuries both in America and in England. Whether the discarding of a preparatory department offsets the founding of a social department with such outworn

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<sup>53</sup> Thwing, Chas. F., "Higher Education in America," p. 349.

<sup>54</sup> Address at the Inauguration of Rev. L. Clark Seelye as President, 1875.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

aims will, perhaps, be a matter of opinion. To the writer, the intellectual honesty and forward look expressed in the challenge of the founder of Vassar College smacks more of a genuine institution of higher learning in spite of the limitation of a preparatory department.

Wellesley College, also in Massachusetts, opened in the same year as Smith. The founders were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Durant who were so devoted to the idea of building up an institution for the higher education of girls that Mr. Durant was really the head of the college although there was a nominal president. He supervised every detail of the college from the pantry to the curriculum which was hardly conducive to great educational growth.<sup>56</sup>

Bowing to the needs of the hour, Wellesley opened a preparatory department to train its prospective students.<sup>57</sup> At the opening session, as was usual the preparatory class far outnumbered the college freshmen, there being two hundred fifty in the one and sixty in the other.<sup>58</sup> But no social department was established nor was there any expressed intention to train the young women in the graces peculiar to "the sex."

Due to the already mentioned peculiarities of its founder, the boarding school idea was only too prevalent. The life of the girls was very carefully scrutinized and their work planned much as was done in boarding schools. The college suffered, also, from frequent changes in its presidents so that it was many years in attaining to the full stature of a first-class college.<sup>59</sup>

It may seem that full justice has not been done Mt. Holyoke College, the third of the famous trilogy of New England colleges for women. Although founded in 1836 as a seminary, its name was not changed to college until 1888 and the privilege of granting degrees was not obtained until 1893. The limitation of being a non-degree-granting institution would debar it from consideration as a college no matter how good its work.

The claim is often made that the quality of work done at Mt. Holyoke Seminary was equal to that accomplished at other institutions which claimed the rank of college and that money was granted to it by the Massachusetts legislature because of this fact. This claim can hardly be allowed since legislatures were very prone to take an optimistic view of any earnest attempt made to educate girls as there were no standards by which either college or secondary school might be judged. The same claim

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<sup>56</sup> Converse, Florence, "The Story of Wellesley."

<sup>57</sup> Catalogue, 1877-78.

<sup>58</sup> Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Education, 1875.

<sup>59</sup> Converse, *op. cit.*

was made, perhaps with equal justice, for Troy Female Seminary and even for other schools not so well established. Mt. Holyoke did splendid pioneer work and has filled and continues to fill a very large need but it can hardly be ranked as a college before 1893.

With the founding of Vassar, Smith and Wellesley as first-class colleges for girls, with ample endowment and equipment, the fight for higher education for girls was won. But there was yet a larger and important task for the colleges to complete. The secondary school in connection with the college had to be discarded and standards raised. The end of the nineteenth century saw both reforms accomplished leaving to the twentieth the opportunity to work out an educational scheme better fitted to the needs of a democracy.